

Leah Beaumont VISTA Experience

My name is Leah Beaumont, a graduate of Sonoma State University with a degree in American Multicultural Studies and concentration in Multicultural Education, and an AmeriCorps VISTA serving with the Santa Rosa Violence Prevention Partnership (The Partnership), through the City of Santa Rosa's Office of Community Engagement. Upon becoming a VISTA, I wasn't entirely sure what to expect. I hoped to learn some things and help some people. I had no idea of the extraordinary learning experience I'd signed up for.

As someone traditionally in the education field, I never expected to be in an environment like this, learning so much and gaining such an appreciation for the ways in which nonprofits and municipalities operate. During my time with the City of Santa Rosa, I've been exposed to a range of opportunities. I have had the incredible honor of interviewing and transcribing the stories of so many inspirational community leaders through my role in the City's Multicultural Roots Project. While this has been a tremendous honor, it has also improved my research, public speaking, and writing skills.

I've observed and assisted with the "behind the scenes" work of nonprofits. From grant writing and other documentation, meetings, planning, and the remarkable people dedicated to the work; I have obtained an abundance of knowledge. Although much of the typical programming had to be altered due to the pandemic, I've been witness to the innumerable selfless and dedicated professionals working tirelessly to address the needs of the members of our community in times of unpredictable challenges. This year of VISTA service was certainly unusual, as it has been for most people. No matter the challenges that arose, I wouldn't have traded my experience. Through the countless unforeseeable matters of this past year, I've gained so much. I have learned to adapt to any situation, to be flexible.

With shifting norms and regulations, I've worn many hats. Running the social media accounts for The Partnership has been one. Through this role, I've explored and increased my creativity, and improved my time management. I have been fortunate enough to gain knowledge regarding community outreach and awareness about the digital divide.

I've learned to be more compassionate, curious, and eager for more knowledge. The Community Engagement team has been committed to learning about and confronting systemic issues, opening the door to educational experiences around social justice and equity. I have been extremely grateful for these learning opportunities and will continue to educate myself on important issues.

My time as a VISTA has improved my professional development and flexibility. This experience has helped me gain skills such as public speaking, navigating technology, networking, and other important soft skills. Most importantly, this position has taught me to never stop learning. With my year of service ending, I can say that my hopes of this position have exceeded my expectations. I would recommend an experience like this to anyone who is interested. The

knowledge and skills gained are incomparable, and will assist me not only professionally, but personally, for the rest of my life.